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SUBJECT: DRC OPPOSITION: SPLINTERED AND BICKERING

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Poloffs met separately with the leadership of the DRC's main political opposition to identify party priorities and gauge the level of coordination between opposition elements. Opposition leaders identified security and justice sector reform as pressing needs, as well as improving relations with Rwanda and progress against the systemic problem of corruption. The Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS--Union pour la democratie et le progres social), which did not participate in the 2006 national elections, indicated that it would participate in local elections scheduled for 2009. Disagreement among opposition parties persists regarding the election modalities for the official opposition spokesman. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a series of separate meetings, Poloffs met with the leadership from the main DRC opposition parties, including Thomas Luhaka, Executive Secretary of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC--Mouvement de liberation du Congo); Joseph Mukendi, Chief of External Communications for the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS--Union pour la democratie et le progres social); Azarias Ruberwa, President of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD--Rassemblement des congolais pour la democratie); and Gilbert Kia Kiakwama, President of the Christian Democratic Convention (CDC--Convention des democrates chretiens).

Opposition: Institutional Reforms and Corruption

¶3. (SBU) All four opposition members stressed the importance of carrying out institutional reform of the army, police, and judicial system. They criticized the high ratio of officers to enlisted men in the national army, as well as the large number of civil servants appointed from the east, particularly Katanga. They noted the corruptive pressure that a dysfunctional judiciary placed on magistrates and the negative impact on attracting foreign investment. Kiakwama (CDC) labeled the current government as nothing more than the legitimization by the 2006 elections of Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL--Alliance des forces democratique pour la liberation du Congo, -- the opposition movement that toppled Mobutu in 1997).

Opposition: 2009 Local Elections Unlikely

¶4. (SBU) The consensus amongst the opposition is that President Kabila's ruling alliance, the Alliance of the Presidential Majority (AMP--Alliance de la majorite presidentielle) would not hold local elections in 2009 as required by the Constitution. Opposition leaders attributed the government's reluctance to hold elections to its high disapproval levels, particularly regarding its handling of the conflict in the eastern DRC, as well as recognition that the GDRC has not delivered on its development priorities. Mukendi (UDPS) said that his party will participate in the 2009 local

elections (Note: that local elections will be held in 2009 has not been confirmed. End note.). Luhaka (MLC) noted that opposition parties are not organized for 2009 elections, although they are committed to them in principle.

Discord Amongst the Opposition

15. (SBU) Disagreement amongst the opposition parties continues to preclude the establishment of internal rules, the first process necessary before electing an opposition spokesman. Luhaka maintains public support for Jean-Pierre Bemba, the MLC's ICC-detained party president. The MLC, therefore, is insisting on an open vote, with no requirement that the spokesman be physically present in the country. Luhaka also added that Ruberwa (RCD) has no standing to be spokesman as he does not currently hold public office. Luhaka claimed that the MLC, in contrast to the radical approach of the UDPS, represented a responsible form of opposition. From another perspective, Kiakwama (CDC) characterized the MLC as undemocratic for dismissing other opposition points of view. Kiakwama also disputed the constitutionality of the MLC insistence on an open vote vice a secret ballot. The RCD claimed that the MLC is inhibited by ties to Bemba, thus preventing the MLC from uniting with other opposition parties to challenge the AMP.

16. (SBU) Comment: Opposition parties have been unable to agree on the internal rules governing the designation of an official spokesman despite the passage of the law defining the status of the political opposition in December 2007. Amongst the opposition, there is consensus on the failings of the Kabila government and the GDRC's inability to achieve its priority development objectives. However, the opposition is unwilling to close ranks on technical issues of power sharing and representation. Opposition deputies and senators have utilized the floors of the Assembly and Senate to

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deliver sharp criticisms of the government. However, this verbal enthusiasm has rarely resulted in active censure or punitive measures. The MLC's majority position within the opposition and its insistence on the candidacy of Bemba are impediments for any near term agreement. At the moment, the DRC political opposition remains splintered, with no prospect for any greater level of cooperation. End Comment.

GARVELINK